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ABSTRACT

An article about the men who are doing organization Development (O.D.) work is presented. It is divided into the following sections: (1) The Elements of O.D. Practice; (2) Interrelationships of the Elements of O.D. Practice; (3) Sources of Data on O.D. Practice; (4) The O.D. Practitioner and the Client; (5) The O.D. Practitioner and the Evaluator; (6) The O.D. Practitioner and the Profession; (7) The O.D. Practitioner and His Program; and (8) O.D. Practice in Perspective. An annotated bibliography is included. (CK)

THE PRACTICE OF ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

A STUDY OF ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION MEMBERS WHO PLAN AND CONDUCT THEM.

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table of contents

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INTRODUCTION

"Organization Development" (O.D.) is the phrase applied increasingly to the process of planfully and deliberately seeking to improve work relationships in organizations. This article is about the men who are doing O.D. work. We will call them O.D. practitioners to emphasize that they are doing the work and training others in the organization to do it. They are not "resident gurus" nor, ideally anyway, are they merely another variety of personnel man.

O.D. work is a growing field of professional practice. Many of America's largest and most progressive organizations have established internal units whose primary purpose is to perform the O.D. function in the organization. Many more are presently working with external, independent consultants who specialize in O.D. Indicative of this interest in Organization Development among organizations is the very rapid growth of the NTL/ Institute of Applied Behavioral Science's "O.D. Network" and of A.S.T.D.'s "Organization Development Division". The former has four hundred members and the latter has over seven hundred. Many individuals probably belong to both associations and, while not all are actually doing Organization Development, the growth and strength of these associations does demonstrate the extraordinary degree of interest in O.D. techniques that there is today.

The idea of a function called Organization Development and the evolution of a professional called an O.D. practitioner are the present-day culminations of studies of organizational behavior that stretch back forty years. Work in the 'twenties, 'thirties, and 'forties was largely devoted to establishing the feasibility of studying human behavior in live organizational contexts. Beginning, however, in the late 'forties, and through

the 'fifties and 'sixties the problem of how to apply this growing body of knowledge has emerged as an issue of at least equal importance to that of generating the knowledge in the first place. The idea that the behavioral sciences are to be applied to organizations is common to most current definitions of what "Organization Development" is, regardless of how the definitions may otherwise differ on such questions as who is to perform the application, and how, when, and why it is to be done.

As noted above, this article focusses on O.D. practitioners in organizations. However, rather than erect a definition of Organization Development a priori and then seek to evaluate practitioner's behavior against it, this article takes a more descriptive approach. The major focus here is to seek answers to the question: What do individuals in organizations, who think of themselves as doing Organization Development, actually do? Thus, what will be described are their apparent ways of operating, their strategies and choices, their practical approaches to the problem of improving the operations of the organizations which employ them.

In order to discuss these patterns as clearly and efficiently as possible, a simple model of the elements of O.D. practice is sketched in the next section. Following this is a description of the sources of information about the practice of O.D. that this article is based on. The remainder of the paper presents the data on the work of O.D. practitioners in terms of various relationships which are identified in the model. Finally are included some conclusions about the present nature of O.D. work and some speculations about the course of its future development.

THE ELEMENTS OF O.D. PRACTICE

The O.D. function is not easily extracted from the ongoing complexity of organizational operations. The nature of O.D. work, as will become clear later on in this article, makes it difficult to treat it as a relatively isolated function with only a few clear-cut ties to the main processes of the system. Even where O.D. "departments" have been set up apart from line operations and personnel departments, the ties and relationships which such units subsequently develop with the rest of the organization are rich and complex. As will be developed further below, this is because O.D. takes the entire organization as potentially its province. Since all the social and technical nooks and crannies of the system can effect performance, O.D. tries to define itself in such a way as to be relevant to all of them.

This characteristic is probably what makes it difficult to understand what O.D. practitioners do. The range of activities they may perform is huge. The variety of organizational circumstances in which they operate is enormous.

Nonetheless some common elements can be specified. In what follows it should be kept in mind that we are attempting to state the basic elements of the O.D. process and a few of their interrelationships in order that the variations of practice which appear in different organizations may be highlighted rather than obscured. The elements are concretely interrelated in myriad ways, but unless we risk oversimplification by stating the elements in the first place, the actual complexity of "live O.D. practice" cannot be portrayed.

The first element is a Practitioner - some person or persons in the

organization who conceives of himself as doing O.D. work. While it may seem so obvious as not to need stating, this is not the case. Many of the principles which one finds in the O.D. literature apply equally to what might be called "good managerial behavior". One could argue that what should be done is to train line managers in these principles and dispense entirely with some quasi-staff role called "O.D. practitioner." While the possibility is appealing, organizations have discovered in practice that there are kinds of things a separate O.D. practitioner can do with and for the line organization that it has a great deal more difficulty performing for itself unaided. What some of these things are will occupy considerable attention below.

The Practitioner works with various individuals and groups in the organization. Therefore, the second element is, to use the prevailing term among O.D. practitioners, a Client or Clients. One of the principal sources of confusion about O.D. work arises with this element. The total scope of the Practitioner's work may be called Organization Development, but in practice he is working with specific Clients who have specific problems or issues in their operations with which they desire help. It is often difficult to see from some remote point (whether inside or outside the organization) how a Practitioner's work with various Clients adds up to something for the organization. Yet this is the way O.D. work proceeds. O.D. work can't be done except in relation to particular clients. Of course, whether a particular O.D. practitioner's work with his various clients does cumulate into something for his particular organization is an open question which can only be answered by looking for the evidence in that system.

The third element in the model is an Evaluator. This may be a some-

what unusual term, but what is meant is the very familiar fact that some person or persons in the system will be making decisions continually about the quality of the Practitioner's work with his Clients. How these decisions are made, how often, with what criteria, whether in a mood of trust or suspicion, what part (if any) the Practitioner plays in them - these are questions we leave open, for wide variances exist among organizations in the way they will be answered.

In this model the Evaluator is also the person or persons who originally decides that there shall be an O.D. effort in the organization. In this decision the basic expectations about what the O.D. effort should accomplish broadly in the organization are presumably established. The basic job description of the O.D. Practitioner may also be laid down, although again, wide differences exist among organizations in the extent to which this is done.

Quite naturally the amount of power allocated to the Evaluator function in this model will mean that in most cases the Evaluator will be "top management". One of the more common caveats among O.D. Practitioners is to make sure that O.D. efforts have the support of top people. The role we assign the Evaluator in the model reflects this principle.

It should also be noted that taken together, the Client and the Evaluator constitute the crucial portion of the O.D. Practitioner's total context in the organization. There are, most certainly, many other persons and events in the system of which he is aware and which may be important in various ways. But the performance of his main function is in reference to these two basic elements.

At various points above O.D. work has been referred to as a "profession". Some will wish to debate whether the term "profession" can properly

be applied to a kind of activity like O.D. work where there is disagreement on the definition of the activity, wide variations on the way it is practiced, disagreement on standards of "effective" practice, debate about the nature of the underlying body of knowledge on which the practice is founded, and considerable variation in the programs and techniques by which Practitioners are trained.

Certainly O.D. work is not as coherent a profession as Medicine, Law, or even Engineering. Yet all the trends among Practitioners in organizations as well as among theorists and researchers in universities are in the direction of increasing the coherence of what we are calling "O.D. work". There is at least enough "out there" in the extra-organizational environment of every O.D. Practitioner to warrant the inclusion of "O.D. Theory" as a fourth element in the model of O.D. practice.

What is meant with the element O.D. Theory is the totality of extra-organizational forces bearing on the O.D. Practitioner that sugges him that he should proceed this way rather than that way, replace this technique with that technique, design this experience for his Client instead of that one, and so forth. More concretely, O.D. Theory includes books he can read, conferences and workshops he can attend, and things he can learn from informal contacts with other O.D. Practitioners in other organizations.

A special and very important example of this element are the ideas and techniques communicated to the practitioner by an external consultant whom he or someone else in his organization may have retained to work with him.

The final element in the model is what the O.D. Practitioner does that he calls O.D. work. This we will refer to as his Program. The term may be slightly misleading since the ordinary definition of a "program" implies something quite planned and specific. Under certain circumstances, O.D.

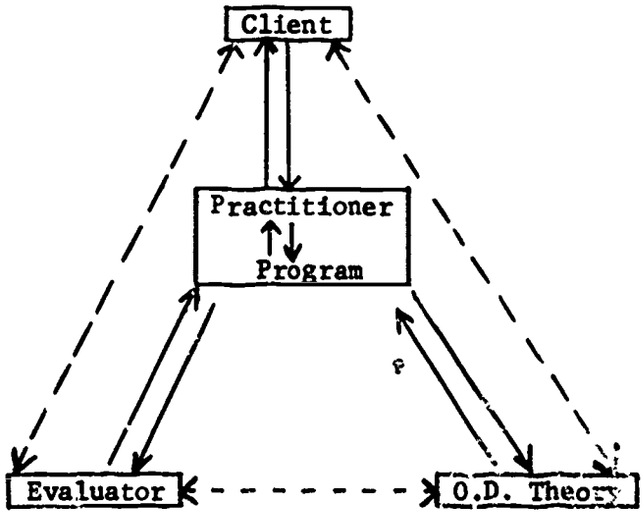
Practitioners are able to develop quite detailed programs of this sort which specify what kinds of things are going to be done with what people for the next several weeks or even months. Certainly these types of activities are included in this element, but also included is the large set of more casual and unplanned activities which O.D. Practitioners would call O.D. work. Examples would be chance conversations with potential Clients where the Practitioner is attempting to determine whether there is anything he can do for the individual and/or the unit he manages; off-the-cuff descriptions to various individuals of what he is doing; informal but nonetheless serious consultations with various individuals on problems of importance to them; and so forth.

By defining "Program" in this broad way we are suggesting that O.D. work is not a narrow band of "on stage" behavior in the experience of many O.D. Practitioners. They view it, rather, as everything they do and symbolize in the organization. Underlying this realization on the part of many O.D. Practitioners is the knowledge that when one is attempting to influence the behavior of another, it is the influencee who chooses what the relevant "signals" are, not the influencer. Therefore, it behooves the influencer to assume that everything he does is potentially relevant to the question of whether or not he gets his message across.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF THE ELEMENTS OF O.D. PRACTICE

In Figure 1 the five elements of O.D. practice have been portrayed diagrammatically. The Practitioner and his Program have been placed at the center. The double arrows emphasize that there is a mutual dependence between the Practitioner and his Program on the one hand, and each of the three external elements - Client, Evaluator, and O.D. Theory - on the other.

Figure 1



Dotted lines are drawn between these latter three elements as well to indicate that relationships exist among them which are apart from and not subject to the direct influence of the Practitioner. Although little will be said further about these dotted line relationships, it is important to recognize that they exist. Clearly a host of relations exist between the Client and the Evaluator since they are both in the same organization and if the Evaluator is high level management, it will be communicating norms and expectations to the Client every bit as much as it will to the Practitioner. The Evaluator-O.D. Theory relationship would include such things as the ideas that the Evaluator himself develops about the ingredients of organizational effectiveness based on his own reading and exposure to new developments outside his organization. These learnings may or may not make it easier for the Practitioner to work with him. It is not all uncommon, however, for the Evaluator and the Practitioner to subscribe to two rather different "schools of thought" about O.D., and for serious problems between them to ensue as a result. Similar events could occur in the Client-O.D. Theory relationship.

Drawn as it is in Figure 1, the model of the elements of O.D. practice is clearly a dynamic thing. The Practitioner is portrayed as making a continuous series of adjustments in his Program, based on the needs of his Clients, the expectations, preferences, and biases of his Evaluators, and the ideas and techniques he can cull from others in the profession outside his organization. His role in this model is by no means a passive one, however. His Program is not determined by these forces. In an active way he is seeking to reformulate the needs the Client brings him and the expectations the Evaluator holds of him such that they are more compatible with what he wants and is able to do in his Program. We do not say he should do this, nor do we say that all O.D. practitioners will be found to be doing this. Rather, the point is the model makes such active reshaping of the forces bearing on him possible. Put another way, the model raises as questions what the nature of these various forces are for a given O.D. practitioner, and if they are unacceptable to him as given what he is doing to attempt to modify the forces and/or their effects on his Program.

The model generates a host of relatively abstract questions which can be asked about the nature of O.D. work. Rather than proceed at this level, however, it is appropriate now to move to the more specific level of what real O.D. practitioners are doing in circumstances such as these. Four major relationships are portrayed in the model: the Client-Practitioner, the Evaluator-Practitioner, the O.D. Theory-Practitioner, and the Practitioner-Program relationships. After a brief section in which the sources of data are described, we will proceed with the exploration of what each of these four relationships is like in practice.

SOURCES OF DATA ON O.D. PRACTICE

In succeeding sections, numerous quotations from O.D. practitioners will be presented to illustrate the workings of the model which has just been presented. These quotations derive from a set of interviews which were conducted by the writer with participants in the Program for Specialists in Organization Training and Development, held by the NTL Institute of Applied Behavioral Science at Bethel, Maine in the Summer of 1969. Forty individuals participated in that Program, of whom seventeen had sufficiently crystallized O.D. roles in industry to make an extended interview about their work appropriate. Many other participants in that Program contributed valuable insights which have been incorporated at various points in this paper.

The interviews typically lasted one hour. In two cases an additional follow-up interview was conducted. All interviews were opened with the following statement by the writer or a close approximation of it:

> My purpose in asking you to be interviewed is to find out more about what O.D. is like for you in your organization. The blow-by-blow, day-to-day nature of O.D. is not very well understood by people who are not doing it all the time, I think. I have become rather concerned in recent months that there is starting to appear in the books and articles statements about what O.D. is <u>supposed</u> to be like that may be a little bit idealistic or impractical. I think we need to know more about what is really possible for O.D. people to do. What opportunities do they see? What sorts of barriers do they encounter? How do they mesh what they want to do with the realities of the system they are in? I would like this interview to be a record of how O.D. is for you, so please start wherever seems most appropriate.

With this introduction, respondents seemed to find it relatively easy to begin to describe what they were doing in their organizations. None of the respondents took issue with some of the judgments about the state of Organizational Development contained in the introductory comment. The interviewer had anticipated that some interviews would tend to become somewhat vague and philosophical, divorced from concrete organizational events, but this did not occur. All respondents talked consistently at a practical level about what they were currently doing in their organizations, about what they hoped to be doing in the near future, about difficulties they were having, either with individuals in the organization or with recalcitrant organizational processes.

All of the respondents were male and in their 30's and early 40's. Most had one to three years' experience in an O.D. role, whether it was called that or not. Two respondents had less than six months' experience, and two had more than three years'. Only one respondent came from an organization in which there appeared to be no understanding whatever of the O.D. function or of the training he was receiving at the Program for Specialists in Organization Training and Development. Most came from companies whose experience with Organization Development paralleled the respondent's own career in the role: he and the company had "grown up together", so to speak. Six respondents, however, came from four companies which would be universally recognized as pioneers in the use of Organization Development programs and techniques.

The writer had anticipated that in his role as interviewer there might be some tendency to regard him as an expert who would somehow "approve" or "disapprove" of the accounts of O.D. work, and that there might be some tendency on the part of respondents to "gild the lily" as they spoke. No

such tendency emerged however. This outcome was most probably due to the general confidence and security of the respondents. Many of them said that as O.D. practitioners they considered an open and trusting style to be the only viable one, and they seemed to be practicing such a style in the interviews.

Two other background sources of data deserve mention in this section. First, a variety of conferences and workshops on O.D. have been attended by the writer in recent years at which O.D. practitioners have described their work and raised the practical questions which confront them in their efforts to change organizations. Data from these events is not reported systematically here, its function being rather to serve as a validating cross-check on the kinds of things respondents described in the interviews.

A second kind of relevant data is the literature which is listed with annotations at the end of this article. A common theme running through the books mentioned there is the need to understand the interrelation between the nature of human organizations and the nature of men's attempts to influence them. Human achievements tend to overshadow and suppress knowledge of the means by which they were brought about. The large bureaucratic organization of today is itself a massive achievement, a monolith of existing conditions against which more and more men feel the urge for more flexible structures. But these urges are puny opponents of the monolith unless coupled with a sense of the process, a sense of the "means by which", more healthy states may be reached. The authors of the books listed have struggled with this issue as have many others, among them the O.D. practitioners whose accounts we have sought to understand.

THE O.D. PRACTITIONER AND THE CLIENT

It was stated earlier that O.D. work requires a client in the organization. There has to be someone who desires help with some aspect of his own work or with that of the people he supervises. In this section we explore the nature of Practitioner-Client relationships further. In looking further at these relationships we are interested in such questions as the following:

- how do Clients and Practitioners get together?
- how do Practitioners build relationships with individuals in the system who may become future Clients?
- how do Practitioners go about determining what the Clients' problems are?
- how do Practitioners correlate what they know and are able to contribute with what Clients need and are able to accept?
- what are some of the kinds of beginning activities that go on between the Practitioner and his Client, once a decision to proceed together has been made?
- what are the major kinds of things O.D. practitioners do for their Clients?
- how do Practitioners and Clients disengage once the O.D. work has been completed?
- what kinds of reactions to their work do Practitioners get from Clients?
- to what extent do Practitioners develop ideas and plans for O.D. work they would prefer to do with particular Clients?

While exhaustive answers to these questions cannot be given, it is possible to discuss the variety of comments that were made in the interviews within this framework. It will be noted that the questions progress from the beginning of a relationship through the performance of the main O.D. work to some conclusion (if any) of the relationship. This format will be followed in discussing the results from the interviews.

Several of the respondents referred to the process by which they and Clients got together as "the way I get business". The main conclusion we can draw from the interviews is that there seems to be a large number of different ways to "get business". A major variable affecting the process by which a Practitioner and a potential Client get together and begin discussing what might be done is the degree of prior familiarity that exists between them. The extremes are well illustrated by the comments of one quite experienced man who said: "Getting going with people is entirely based on previous contacts I've had with them, or somebody refers them to me - says, 'You ought to go see this guy.' A new person just starting out in O.D. would have a hard time being effective with this kind of a strategy because he wouldn't know anybody." In contrast, a man with less experience in O.D. whose organization knew very little about what it could do explained: "We got started after my boss got turned on himself and then he just went out like a salesman and got five Department Heads and Assistant Vice Presidents and their subordinates to go through a five-day education program that we had designed."

In the one case the exploration between Practitioner and potential Client has the flavor of a personal conversation between friends on the subject of how O.D. might be helpful in the potential Client's operations. In the other, the initial relationship is more impersonal; it is "role to role" rather than "man to man".

What start out as relatively formal relationships, however, can often evolve into much more personal contacts, whether a subsequent agreement to do O.D. work results or not. Here, for instance, is a description of such a process from one of the interviewees who had considerable experience in O.D.:

"The opening-up process can be as simple as calling a guy up and saying, 'Hey, we've never gotten very well acquainted. Is there anything we're doing that would be of interest to you? How about lunch? Over a period of time things can develop. I find out about his problems and he finds out about our capabilities. Depending on how things jell, we sometimes strike up a contract. It's like selling from the outside.

"It's a very large organization and if I don't work at making sure we are not left out, there will be many occasions when we should be involved that we won't be. For instance, there was a large production department that I felt completely cut out from. Some of the Training people were doing a lot of work there so that was one entre I was going to use. But then their Vice President said to them, 'You ought to have this new guy come to one of your meetings and tell you what he does.' So I was invited over and I put on a little thing for them about O.D. In this case I unwittingly used as an example something that was a very sensitive subject for them, and they got the idea I was a hatchet man. It was completely innocent on my part, but it took a year to recover from that. Then by chance I took an automobile trip with the manager of that group and over the miles he got to know me. Once that was established he moved me in and today that department is our biggest client."

Here, the Practitioner is taking the initiative, seeking to develop a relationship to a point where a serious examination of the possibility of doing O.D. can take place.

The process of developing relationships with potential clients is clearly a matter of persuasion. While most of the respondents stressed the rather delicate and fragile nature of the process, there were references to the need under some conditions to be more insistent. Here is a particularly vivid description:

"I keep talking to people to find out what is going on. I ask them if I can sit in on their meetings, read their memoranda - stuff like that. Sometimes I play the role of an uninvited mirror, and I get thrown out of some places, too. I had one guy tell me, 'I don't have any problems. I don't foresee having any problems. I don't need you. If you can prove to me we have a problem, maybe I'll listen to you.'

"I told him he was inviting me to get into a fight. He said that's what he wanted. I said, 'O.K.' Well, I was back in an hour. I said, 'Here's a memo you sent out to your people. You state a

> policy decision at the beginning and then you reverse it at the end. What do you think your people are going to do about this particular thing?' He said, 'No, it's consistent, it's very clear.' I said, 'O.K., why don't you call any three of your managers and ask them how they interpret it. So he did, and the response he got from all three guys he called was, 'You know, we've been meaning to ask you about that memo - it's not really very clear.' He said to me, 'All right, you win'.
>
> "He's not my most committed client, I'll admit. The hell of it is when you take that role it can be very satisfying, but also very exhausting."

The process of acquiring Clients in the organization is not always strictly a process of an open-ended exploratory conversation. One of the men interviewed had gotten an O.D. effort started in his company by first writing a lengthy memorandum in which he described what O.D. was, what he thought it could do, and what sequence of implementing steps were needed to get started. He then spent two or three months explaining, extending, and in some cases defending his memo with various members of top management. In this instance, the Evaluator group had to be "sold" on the value of O.D. before it was legitimate for this man to hold any conversations with any potential Clients.

Still another variation on the Client acquisition process occurs in companies where there is an on-going O.D. effort. Here it seems that the O.D. man coming in new merely takes over a set of Clients who have been previously developed by other O.D. people in the organization. This way of acquiring Clients is not as problematic as the case where the Practitioner is starting cold. It is still not automatic, however, for as one Practitioner working in a company with an established O.D. program explained: "It has been interesting for me because I'm a change-agent-come-lately to our company's O.D. program. The issue for me has been to figure out what my job is, what the clients expect of me, what my contribution can be in my

own area." He is saying in effect that Clients have developed expectations about the kind of O.D. work they are going to receive and he, the new practitioner, is strongly affected by these expectations.

As Practitioner and Client discuss what kind of O.D. effort might be possible, the Practitioner is attempting to diagnose the sort of situation the Client has. "Diagnosis" is the term the respondents used. While the term may have the unfortunate overtones of making the process more cut and dried than it actually is, and of making the Practitioner more of a "technocrat" (i.e., an expert with a tool kit) than he actually is, "diagnosis" does focus attention on the complex problem of figuring out what the issue is.

The Practitioners who were interviewed held in common the conviction that diagnosis is a joint process with the Client. It cannot be, they said, a situation where a "naive" Client talks for awhile about "where it hurts", and then is informed in more sophisticated scientific language what his problem "really" is. The need for a joint determination of what the issue is between Practitioner and Client is summed up in a phrase used over and over by respondents: "Meeting the Client where he is". One Practitioner described how he varies his approach to suit the needs, interests, and biases of various potential Clients. "I don't see this as a matter of facades or veneers", he said, "I see this as a set - as a range of appropriate behaviors which <u>is</u> me."

Several respondents spoke of the barrier which sophisticated scientific language can erect between the Practitioner and a potential Client. "All our work is couched in terms of the everyday vernacular", said one. "We try not to use the behavioral jargon". Another Practitioner observed that the

O.D. function in an organization should be identified with Personnel rather than with the behavioral sciences so that "managers don't have to think of themselves as having to deal with social scientists". He noted that in his own organization the O.D. function had originally been strongly differentiated from Personnel, but that now with the benefit of hindsight he felt this was a serious mistake.

Practitioners reported various techniques for performing this process of joint diagnosis with the Client. Some of the techniques were fairly simple, such as this one:

> "I figure out where he wants to go with his operation - what he thinks would make it better. Then I compare that with where I think he ought to be going. Usually we're not too far apart. Then I work to help him see two things: one, how costly it is to stay where he is, and two, what the opportunities are for moving in the direction he wants to."

In contrast, another Practitioner who had considerable experience described his approach:

> "I use a kind of diagnostic model - I call it one though I'm not sure that it is - that I find useful. It takes all the kinds of things that managers are normally concerned with and are bugged about: goal setting, leadership, integration of various parts of the system, role problems, control problems, the reward system, and so forth. It's a list of ten or fifteen items which I can run down in my mind as I'm talking to a guy and relate to what he's talking about. I find it very helpful."

Some diagnostic devices are not localized to a particular Client but rather reflect the Practitioner's desire to understand more about the general processes of the organization as a prelude to determining where he might profitably seek Clients. One respondent, for instance, described an elaborate project he carried out for understanding how decisions were made in his organization. The outcome of the study was the identification of a set of potential Clients at the Vice President level of his organization whom he then approached for more specific explorations.

A variation on such a quasi-research effort by the Practitioner occurs where the Practitioner makes a general diagnosis of the state of the organization, but knows he will need considerable data to support this diagnosis when working with top management. He therefore sets about collecting such validating information prior to initiating further discussions about O.D. with anyone. One respondent provided a particularly dramatic case of this which involved a year long attempt to document the paternalistic practices of the organization and the consequences of these practices. Typically such efforts are carried on more or less covertly. O.D. Practitioners seem not to seek a specific go-ahead from management to study the general nature of the organization. "Much of the work I'm doing", said one, "goes flatly counter to some of the long-standing and cherished principles and norms of the organization. I better damn well understand what those are and what they mean to people before I go in and start shaking things."

Combining this point about diagnosing the organization's problems with the earlier point about "meeting the client where he is", one of the fundamental tensions of O.D. work emerges. The Practitioner must walk the thin line between having a well-developed personal theory about what is wrong with the organization but being unable to persuade potential Clients of its rightness, and not having any theory at all about what is wrong and thus being completely dependent on the Client for data on what the problems are. If the O.D. Practitioner permits himself to go too far with his own theorizing, he risks cutting himself off from the system. If he doesn't go far enough he isn't able to make any particular special contribution as a professional with a unique perspective. Feelings of cynicism, alienation, withdrawal, and despair may well accompany the creation of an elaborate personal theory of what is wrong with the system. Feelings of not knowing what one's special identity and function are can accompany the refusal to do any per-

sonal theorizing at all.

O.D. Practitioners get over these hurdles, however, and move on to the business of actually doing O.D. work with various Clients. In the interviews it is quite clear that the range of things Practitioners do which they call O.D. work is very wide. Some common themes, however, do emerge. First is usually some event which gets members of the Client system looking at their problems in new ways. The most common technique for doing this as revealed in the interviews is for members of the Client's system to have an experience in some kind of sensitivity training group. We must phrase this vaguely since there are so many variations in the kinds of groups there are. The general aim on the Practitioner's part is to get the Client into a setting where he can talk about old issues in new ways and where new issues which have always been taboo can get discussed for the first time. These events occur in two places. Some Practitioners preferred for members of the Client system to have this experience outside the organization at a program conducted by an independent training organization such as the NTL/Institute for Applied Behavioral Science. Others felt the same objectives could be met by bringing in an external consultant who was qualified to conduct such sessions. Whether it is done one way or the other seems to depend on whether the Practitioner knows of consultants who can be brought in, has the budget to do it, has had good luck with bringing in outsiders in the past, and feels the Client is ready to begin working fairly quickly on day-to-day work-related problems. Where these conditions do not obtain - particularly where the Client is not yet ready to begin to look hard at work-related issues involving himself and his associates - Practitioners tend to recommend an external experience as the initial step.

A matter of considerable importance is the question of what the Practi-

tioner expects to have happen to the Client in these sensitivity training experience. Debate has been going on for over a decade about what happens to people in sensitivity training. In particular the question has been whether people "really" change as a result of working in such groups. Strong positions have been taken on both sides of the issue. Elaborate research projects to investigate the nature of behavioral change which occurs have been mounted. The feelings which have been generated around whether what happens in sensitivity training is at all helpful constitute one of the most stubborn barriers to understanding what O.D. work is.

In light of all this it is perhaps surprising that the Practitioners interviewed in this project held in general quite matter-of-fact and undoctrinaire attitudes about sensitivity training. Specifically, they did not expect "great things to happen" as a result of the Client's initial exposure to these methods. In no interview can there be an interpretation that the Practitioner expected some consultant or some extra-organization training agency to solve the Client's main problems so that he, the Practitioner, would be somehow relieved of the responsibility. Much more common were such statements by the Practitioner referring to a Client as: "He'd been to a T group the previous summer and when he came back he was ready to try some things with his people." Or, "It looked like the first step was to get him (a Client) off to a lab where he could kind of find out for himself what all this O.D. stuff was all about."

From these Practitioners' point of view, the function of the initial sensitivity training experience was to open up questions in the Client's mind, to plant concepts which could be followed-up later. The group experience provided a set of events which the Practitioner could capitalize on

in his subsequent work with the Client. In this sense, the group experience seemed to be regarded by those interviewed as an extremely effective device for communicating what the subsequent focus of the O.D. work was going to be, namely on men's relationships with one another, on ways these relationships could be improved, on the misgivings, doubts, and fears which always accompany attempts to change human relationships. The group communicated these things to the Client more fully, completely, and efficiently than Practitioners often felt they could by sitting down and trying to explain what O.D. entailed in some intellectual, organized way.

In light of these relatively modest and practical expectations for what sensitivity training should accomplish in the O.D. effort, it is not surprising that Practitioners revealed considerable annoyance as they recounted how some in their organizations regarded them as "boy psychiatrists" or as the "company shrink". Nothing could be further from the intentions which most of them had in employing sensitivity training techniques.

It should be stressed that among those interviewed a number of other techniques besides sensitivity training were employed as the initial experience for the Client. Some used seminars and workshops which dealt with substantive material - theories and research findings - rather than interpersonal relationships. Some had their Clients read books about O.D. The works of Douglas McGregor, Rensis Likert, and Richard Beckhard were mentioned most often. Following such exposure the Practitioner could then say to the Client, "How can we go about beginning to apply some of these ideas in your system?" (Current theories of the change process in the literature do not place much faith in the capacity of books to move a Client forward significantly, but the event was reported often enough in the interviews to suggest that in practice it is a more common process than is supposed.)

Once the Client and the practitioner have passed this initial stage where the Client learns the basic ideas which underlie O.D. work, they are ready to design a program of continued O.D. work in the Client's system. By far the majority of those interviewed did not view this process as one which could be spelled out in detail. The term "design" therefore should not be narrowly construed as the exact specification of a stream of experiences over succeeding months. Rather, at most it seems that Practitioners regard the specification of "phases" and broad patterns of events as the appropriate degree of design. These phases might go as follows (synthesizing from several of the interviews):

Months 1-3: Initial meetings of team (or teams) in Client organization focussing on problem diagnosis. Objective is to define issues in terms that make sense to everyone involved.

Month 4: Discussions with teams about alternative steps to solve issues raised.

Month 5: Decisions about best alternatives - getting clearance from top management to proceed to implement.

Month 6-8: Implementation of programs decided on and approved.

We do not suggest this is an "ideal" O.D. program. It is stated, rather, to indicate the degree of specificity with which Practitioners seem to design their O.D. programs. Certainly there are variations: one Practitioner was interviewed who preferred to spell things out in much greater detail to the point where he had nearly a daily schedule of what he would be doing in a given Client's organization. Others did not design their programs with even the degree of looseness in the illustration, preferring instead to let things evolve as they would and attempt to gear their behavior to the opportunities and contingencies of the moment.

One important consideration in this process of designing an O.D. pro-

gram will only be mentioned for the moment, but discussed in more detail when we come to discuss Practitioner-Evaluator relationships. This is the "visibility" issue. The more one spells out one's program, the easier it is to show top management something when they ask for a report on the O.D. Practitioner's activities.

The most common activity by far in on-going O.D. programs is what the respondents called "team development" or "team building". The importance of these activities is also reflected in the growing literature on O.D. "Team development" is essentially the identification of natural work teams in the Client's organization. The internal working relationships on these teams and their characteristic relationships with the rest of the organization then become the focus of O.D. work. The question is how relationships can be improved so that the team's mission in the system can be more effectively discharged.

Those interviewed took the basic strategy of team development as given. None regarded it as a debatable approach which needed to be defended or justified. Thus, the interviews contain little about <u>why</u> the Practitioner uses a team development approach, but instead focus on how he does it. Here is a typical account:

> "So I'd meet with the team. We'd talk about why I was there. The boss would talk about why I was there. I'd describe how I saw my role - get that on the table. Then I'd say, 'You know, the behavioral sciences say there are these kinds of things about an organization that very often get in its way' - I'd mention a few things I thought might apply to them. Then I'd say, 'Let's try to take a quick look at these and see if any of them apply here.'
>
> "And in working with them kind of in the back of my mind I'm working the problem-solving model - you know, see if you can't define the problem or problems, get the data, get the team to look at alternatives but not just grab at one or two, take a look at the potential consequences of the various alternatives, think a little about the underlying assumptions of the alternatives. Your role is to keep them thinking without shoving stuff under the rug or falling into oversimplifications. After awhile it begins to become clear

to them what the problems are and where they want to go. As they get practice in looking at things this way you can step back more and more, not have to push them quite so hard to look at the problems and at the data."

Sometimes the Practitioner's use of the team development approach places him on the boundary between teams in the system where he can play a key mediating role, as in this account:

"Top management thought the foremen didn't give a damn, and the foremen thought the same thing about top management. This came out very clearly meeting separately with them. The lower level guys were almost pleading to be brought in on things more. We took the foreman group and after some basic sessions on interpersonal relations we gave them the task of defining what their role is today and what they would like it to be in the future.

"Things just took off - there wasn't another push needed by us. They were a little cautious for about a month - are you O.D. guys for real? Can we trust you? What's your relation to top management?

"But the top was really ready to respond because things were so bad. One of the first things the lower level guys decided was that they should have the top people in these sessions for defining their future role. Once they began working long lists of problems, tasks, and future agenda items began to appear. There was so much data it took two months to sort through it all to identify the real basic issues.

"Then they broke down into sub-groups to work on the various issues. This led to all sorts of other people in the company getting involved. It became possible to do a lot of work on inter-group relations all through the system. The basic thing we did was to get these separate groups of people thinking about and talking to each other about common gripes. From there the thing ran itself."

A team development strategy has the additional function of tying the Practitioner to the Client's organization in a way which would not occur if he only met with people one at a time. "I get to meet all kinds of people in the team meetings", said one Practitioner, "who I'd probably not get to know in the normal course of things at all. In a few cases this has led to further O.D. work with them on other issues besides those we're focussing on. The team meetings also teach me a great deal about the nature of the

work which I'd never get if I just walked around the plant or only talked to supervisors or higher managers."

Since those interviewed were all doing O.D. in quite structured organizational settings, it would be comparatively easy to identify work teams and move on to the question of how their performance could be improved. We should note in passing, however, that others are trying to use O.D. techniques in more fluid and unstructured situations where natural work teams may not be as easily identified. Working at the "grass roots" in communities would be an example of such a situation as would working with voluntary organizations which did not have a highly structured division of labor. In such situations it may be that the Practitioner's first task is to foster the kinds of groups we are calling "teams". Or alternatively, it may be necessary to invent other strategies entirely for working with such more fluid systems.

Early in this section we raised the question of how Practitioner and Client "disengage" as the O.D. program proceeds to a conclusion. As can perhaps be inferred from these comments on team development, however, O.D. programs don't "conclude" in the minds of these Practitioners. Rather, a gradual shift in the locus of initiation seems to occur. More and more the team takes over the process of problem identification, invention of alternative solutions, decision, and implementation. Less and less do the Practitioners feel they have to be the ones who "prod". To use a term that is quite common in their accounts, more and more "ownership" of the O.D. programs shifts to the Client. Their role shifts, correspondingly to one of occasionally "touching base" with the Client to see how things are going, remaining alert to the possibility that there are new unique functions they can fulfill for the Client.

This, at least, seems to be the way Practitioners would prefer the O.D. process to proceed: it never concludes, but is instead incorporated into the Client's natural way of conducting his operations.

It does not always work quite this way, however. A number of those interviewed spoke of having "more business than I can possibly handle." None of them like this situation. Instead they spoke of not having the time to get as involved with any particular Client as they would like, of being chronically tired and frustrated because there was so much to be done. The solution to the difficulty that most of them saw was for the O.D. group to be enlarged.

In terms of the comments above about O.D. ways of proceeding becoming incorporated into the Client's operations, what this problem of overcommitment may signal is a failure of the part of the Practitioner to bring about this changeover in ownership to the Client. He opens up many relationships, gets many Clients moving, creates more excitement and optimism among Clients than perhaps they have felt in a long time, but he does not succeed in getting himself out of the "key person role". This is clearly one of the unsolved problems of O.D. practice, at least among those interviewed. None of the respondents were confident that they knew how to solve this problem although one, a Practitioner who had several younger men doing O.D. work under his supervision in addition to his own practice, felt that the solution lay in creative O.D. efforts within his <u>own</u> group. That is, he saw the members of his group helping each other in some of these very complex Client relationships. "We all work together in staff meetings," he said, "and my inputs are down to about twenty per cent. They're teaching each other now as a conscious activity - a dignified and very important activity to enable us to carry out our mission in the system."

We raised the question at the outset of this section of whether Practitioners develop longer-term objectives for work they would like to do with particular Clients. The answer is that most of them do, not surprisingly. In virtually all the interviews the Practitioner expressed a desire in succeeding months to begin to work with one or more groups in his system to which he did not then have access. It is significant, however, that the problem of access came up so consistently when talking about the future. Earlier in this section we talked about "getting business" and "building relationships". Perhaps, to conclude this section on the Client more should be said about it. There is no question that in the minds of these respondents the problem of how to make various people in their organizations aware of them and of what O.D. can potentially do ranks as a top priority issue. Some have developed techniques for getting business, as we noted, while others seem to rely more on chance contacts and the opportunities of the moment. But no one seemed pleased or satisfied with his own resolution of the issue.

The sharpness of the frustration which the respondents felt on the problem of access was probably heightened by the accompanying feeling that they really knew what they would like to do with a given Client once they could get him interested in O.D. It was clear in the interviews that these men possessed a wealth of ideas and techniques for moving a Client forward and were eager to practice them. In some interviews there was a very strong feeling of: "If only I could help this Client over his initial doubts and misgivings, he (and his group) and I could really take off together." There is a danger of romanticizing the issue, of course, but it would be equally misleading to imply that these Practitioners did not have the feelings of urgency that we suggest they do.

In the potential Client's attitude toward his own operations the Practitioner often confronts a closed system of logic which simultaneously justifies his present way of doing business and denies that any new system of ideas and practices such as O.D. can do him any good. What we have been describing in this section are the practical efforts O.D. men are using to break into this closed system of logic. Where they succeed, it is clear that new ways of operating organizations can result. But it is also clear that the viability of the profession hinges on learning to make these initial interventions more effectively.

THE O.D. PRACTITIONER AND THE EVALUATOR

The term "Evaluator" refers to the person or persons in the organization who originally give the Practitioner the responsibility for doing O.D. work and who subsequently evaluate the quality of his work. To be sure, the Client makes evaluations of the quality of the Practitioner's work, but it appears from the interviews that only in quite small organizations is the Client also likely to be the same person or office who makes the strategic evaluation of the overall O.D. effort. More typically, someone other than the Client and Practitioner, who are performing the day-to-day O.D. work, makes the initial decision giving the go-ahead and makes later determinations about the value of the O.D. function.

In this analysis we have treated the Practitioner's work with the Client first, but among the Practitioners interviewed most of them actually spent many days and weeks working with Evaluators before they ever got into concrete O.D. work with Clients. In organizing the material, however, it was assumed that the Practitioner's relations with Evaluators could be better understood if it was preceded by a description of what Practitioners do with Clients.

In exploring Practitioner-Evaluator relationships further, there are three broad kinds of questions to be kept in mind:

- what are the initial starting conditions of O.D. efforts as established by Evaluators?
- as an O.D. program proceeds, what kinds of influences do Evaluators exert?
- how do Practitioners seek to maintain and extend the support of Evaluators?

With the reference to starting conditions above we have in mind such things as the conditions in the organization which led top management to consider an O.D. effort, the way the O.D. role (and/or Department) is located in the structure of the system, the kind of job definition and basic responsibilities the Practitioner is given, and the expectations Evaluators seem to have for the O.D. effort. The process of working these things out often takes months. It is not common for a Practitioner to receive a provisional go-ahead to work with Clients while these basic questions of the role and responsibilities of the O.D. function are still being worked out.

These matters were of great concern to most of those interviewed. There was a common awareness among them that the decisions which are made about where O.D. shall be located and how its function shall be defined play an important part in the Practitioner's subsequent ability to gain access to potential Clients and to influence them.

Very few of the Practitioners interviewed were completely satisfied with the way O.D. was defined and located structurally in their organizations, and very few reported satisfaction with the specific definition of their own jobs. What made the difference, however, was whether a given Practitioner felt he could talk to top management about such problems, versus being unable to and having to live with the ambiguities indefinitely. Much

has been written about the need for support from the top; it is one of the major caveats of O.D. work that ambitious programs with Clients should not be attempted without it. The positive importance of a "friend in power" and/or the negative importance of a "skeptic (or enemy) in power" came up in every one of the interviews.

Here, for instance, is a Practitioner describing how the process of gaining support from Evaluators went for him:

> "Finally after stewing for awhile about whether to try it I did what my gut told me and sat down and really had it out with my boss, the Personnel Manager. For about three hours, in fact' I decided this was the first bridge and I'd better find out whether I could cross it or not. I had to get him on board. After about three hours of discussion I think he finally began to see what I wanted to do with O.D. in the company. When he finally got the message he became very supportive and has said several times since that this is the most important thing going on in Personnel."

Another strategy Practitioners have employed, a more risky one, has been to expose Evaluators to the O.D. process itself. The idea is that if they have personal experience with the kinds of events which make up O.D. they will be more likely to give their blessing. For instance, here is how one of the respondents described his strategy:

> "Over the last couple of years we have tried to get a number of people who seem to be centers of influence in the hierarchy thinking about O.D. kinds of things - shake them up a little, I guess you could say. We've sent them off to some seminars and workshops, even a few sensitivity training labs. These were very carefully selected people. We chose them because they were influential and because we thought they were basically sympathetic to O.D. Our strategy has been to try to get key people all around the system thinking about ways to improve things."

Practitioners reported several instances where the pressure of the competitive environment or chronic internal problems of long-standing put top management in a more receptive mood regarding the possibility of an O.D. effort. These issues were typically broader and more pervasive than would be the problems of a particular Client which subsequently became the focus

of an O.D. effort. Such things as a dramatic change (either upward or downward) in demand for the organization's product; cash flow crises; high turnover, especially of expensive technical personnel; mergers and new acquisitions; and major internal reorganizations were all mentioned by Practitioners as providing the opening wedge which permitted them to go to Evaluators and suggest that the kinds of difficulties stemming from such events as these could best be addressed by a planned O.D. effort.

Some of the respondents, however, noted that the existence of a system-wide crisis of some sort was not an unmixed blessing in the attempt to get an O.D. effort chartered. They reported it was hard to "get management's attention" when it was preoccupied with the crisis. Further, that once they did get management to listen it was dangerously easy to oversell what O.D. efforts could accomplish; management in its eagerness to find a way out of the crisis could develop unrealistic expectations about the value of O.D.

These various difficulties with getting Evaluators to establish an O.D. effort underlie one of the more interesting results from the interviews. Consistently Practitioners seemed to avoid visibility, status, and publicity for themselves and their O.D. Programs. In only one interview did the Practitioner seem proud of the visibility that the O.D. Department had, and this was in an organization where O.D. had very strong support from the top. Much more common in the interviews were comments such as:

"We never use the term O.D. to describe what we are doing."

"I wouldn't want to be known as an O.D. Practitioner - Manpower Development is fine as a title."

"We're much better off without a lot of prestige at headquarters. If you've got too much status, Clients get scared and suspicious."

"If I'm going to have a title at all, 'Consultant' is just fine."

"I might get offered a Vice Presidency but if I do it will put me in a real bind. It might be nice to have the big title and all but it will pretty much undercut my credentials with Clients."

"I'm quite happy having no title and position description because then people ask and it gives me an excuse to start talking O.D. to them."

"I'm just as glad to be known as the Personnel Manager. I can do all the regular Personnel kinds of things but in an O.D. way. But people are afraid of Personnel."

"O.D. doesn't have a good reputation in our company. We talk about jobs, about production, about performance evaluation. A friend of mine in another division did get himself the title of Manager of Organization Development and he's having a bitch of a time. Words like 'trust' - trust is tremendously important, but you say 'trust' to a plant manager and he'll laugh in your face."

"Sitting at my desk I can reach all sorts of people on the phone - people I've worked with on other things over the years. But I can't use O.D. theory to explain or justify what I want to do. That would scare everybody. The only influence I have is the influence I can bring to bear as a person who is thought of as being reasonably loyal and competent."

"I sometimes ask my boss for more status but he knows I'm pulling his leg. A lot more status would kill me with Clients. Right now I have no title. I have an office but I'm getting moved to a smaller one. Just me and a window. I won't say I always like seeming to be a nobody."

The desire to keep O.D. a relatively "low profile" effort is a joint result of the kind of support Practitioners receive from Evaluators and of the relations they want to create with Clients. If Evaluator support is shaky or ambiguous, Practitioners seem to feel they are running a considerable risk. An elaborate and highly visible O.D. Program under these conditions feels to them like crawling 'way out on an organizational limb'. On the other hand, if Evaluator support is too strong, enthusiastic, and visible, the Practitioner fears that the Client will be overwhelmed and be driven to either resist all the pressure or comply with the Program for the wrong reasons, i.e., reasons of obedience to the apparent wishes of top

management. None of the Practitioners interviewed would want Clients to cooperate in a sustained O.D. effort just because top management ordered them to. And yet Practitioners do want Clients to realize that there is top management support, that the proposals of the Practitioner are not frivolous or subversive of the wishes of the top. Furthermore, we should note that the kind and nature of the support of Evaluators is intimately related to the Practitioner's problem of access to Clients as discussed at the close of the last section. Evaluators can help the Practitioner choose the most relevant areas of the organization in which to seek Clients. The Practitioner needs to know and be able to communicate to potential Clients how an O.D. effort will fit in with the longer range plans of top management for the growth of the business.

The problem of getting the right kind and degree of Evaluator support is clearly one of the most difficult ones Practitioners face. In very few cases in the interviews did Practitioners have a top management that was sufficiently sophisticated about O.D. that it understood the complexities of this problem of support. In the great majority of cases, Practitioners had to figure out the kind of support they needed and then seek it from a management that was largely unaware of all the subtleties involved.

In light of the importance of the Practitioner's relation to Evaluators, one might expect that those interviewed would have been preoccupied with the question of how they could prove they were effective in their O.D. efforts. Hard evidence that O.D. was paying off for the organization would presumably be an effective means of gaining and maintaining the support of top management. However, there was comparatively little concern expressed in the interviews about proving the effectiveness of O.D. Only one respon-

dent expressed the clear desire for better measures of what O.D. was accomplishing. He put it this way:

> "I just wish there was some way of quantifying what we're doing a little bit better, because of course that's the thing that gets the manager's eye.
>
> "We're going to have to rely on convincing managers that working on all these intervening things - human relationships, leadership styles, and so forth - is what it takes to change the end-result things. Making that correlation is pretty difficult with some managers. I wish there was some way to take the end result things and display them somehow so that they relate more to what we are doing in O.D."

When asked what sort of data he was presently relying on, this same man said:

> "Well, one piece of evidence, I suppose, is that people keep coming back to us. We figure they probably wouldn't if they didn't think it was helpful. Another thing is that people tell us they think it is helping them. We've interviewed some people and tried to measure some of the things they said were changing. Some of the technical measures have improved a little.
>
> "Then in the team meetings we can say things like whether a particular problem was solved or not. We can't say we solved it, of course. The team did, but we seemed to offer them a vehicle for doing something that they couldn't do before."

The reliance on the subjective opinions of Clients and Evaluators indicated in this statement is characteristic of what most of those interviewed are doing. The key question, of course, is: Does the Client feel that the issues which are the focus of the O.D. effort are being dealt with effectively? Those interviewed apparently felt their Clients were reasonably satisfied with the results of the effort, even if these results could not be measured objectively.

There is another issue running through the problem of effectiveness which should be mentioned, also. This is the question of what the Practitioners define as "achievement" in the first place. None of them would argue, of course, that the long run goal is to make the organization more successful in terms of the measures it uses to define success, be they

"sales", "profits", "quality of output", etc. But the preliminary achievement from the point of view of these Practitioners is to get people in the organization looking at ways to improve it. Thus, it is an achievement when a group of managers who have never talked before about their working relationships begin doing it. It is an achievement when a boss starts looking at his affect on the people under him and seeking feedback from them about ways he can improve. It is an achievement when a policy-maker agrees to consider alternative approaches to the problem of maintaining control of operations that he has never considered before. These are the "intervening things" the man just quoted was talking about. For him and for the others interviewed, such achievements as these may represent weeks of effort.

To regard such events as achievements which prove the value of having an O.D. effort, it is necessary to hold the underlying assumption that whenever people in the organization are able to collaborate openly on the problem of how to strengthen the organization, a stronger organization will result. Even if nothing in policy or operations is changed as a result of such analysis, the argument is that the organization is stronger for knowing more fully and completely why it is doing what it is doing than it did before.

There is another sense in which these Practitioners experience effectiveness. It doesn't appear explicitly in the interviews but can be inferred from the way Practitioners talk about how they proceed. It can be called "process accomplishment". These Practitioners preferred not to play political games in their systems. They expressed distaste for manipulating Clients or Evaluators. They did not want to operate as "high priests" or to

be seen as operating this way. They tended to hold themselves to norms of trying to deal openly and collaboratively with Clients and Evaluators. They wanted their day-to-day working relationships with Clients and Evaluators to be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

Where they felt these conditions were obtained, a real sense of the accomplishment of a process came through in the interviews. It was expressed in feelings of real satisfaction and pride. Conversely, where Practitioners reported that against their own preferences and better judgment they did have to use politics and covert strategies, they expressed regret and dissatisfaction. The end for them did not justify these means. Some spoke of leaving their organizations if they had to function in such a way for very much longer.

These norms about the <u>way</u> one should proceed to do O.D. derive from the personal values of the Practitioner and from evolving ideas about organizational change in the theoretical literature on O.D. At the present time these norms seem to be largely unknown to Evaluator groups in organizations, and are in fact viewed somewhat cynically in some quarters. Yet we can speculate that over the longer run the strength of the O.D. function in organizations will depend considerably on their developing a wider awareness of these norms of procedure.

THE O.D. PRACTITIONER AND THE PROFESSION

This last point about "process accomplishment" leads nicely into a more extended discussion of the effect on the Practitioner of seeing himself as part of an enterprise that spans many organizations and which even transcends national boundaries. In discussing the model of O.D. earlier in this paper

the phrase "O.D. Theory" was used to denote these extra-organizational forces which affect the Practitioner. At the present time "O.D. Theory" is a more descriptive phrase than "the Profession" because, as was noted, there are so many variations in standards of practice that it may be presumptuous to erect a Profession and imply that the Practitioner is somehow bound by it. There are at present no "bar exams"; there is no licensing procedure for O.D. Practitioners; a Practitioner cannot be sued for malpractice; no common body of knowledge has been explicitly agreed on in the universities and other training centers. Yet the trends are in these directions and it is worth examining the nature of the Practitioner's present awareness of norms in his environment. The term "Theory" says there is a loosely-structured collection of such norms.

The issue can be divided into two categories of ideas. First are ideas about organizations, about how they work, about how they change, about what their characteristic problems are and about the conditions under which these problems emerge. These ideas are relatively academic: they have resulted from years of research and theorizing by psychologists and sociologists. The second category is of ideas about how to change organizations, about how to influence events. Not as much is known of a factual nature about how to change organizations as there is about the basic nature of organizations. There is, of course, a large storehouse of practical wisdom available to anyone growing up in a given culture. Some of it has even been fairly well codified in management textbooks and elsewhere.

The two categories are closely related, of course. How one goes about changing a thing depends to a great extent on what the thing is like and on what one wants it to become.

The Practitioners interviewed for this paper felt much more secure in

their knowledge about what organizations are like and about what organizations can become than they did about their knowledge of how to change them. There was a consistent expression among them of knowing what they wanted to do but having to rely on intuition and on-the-spot invention of techniques for accomplishing it. To a large extent this is a negative inference from the interviews. No one spoke of feeling confident that he knew how to go about doing what he wanted to do. There were several comments such as: "If I could figure out a way to get those two managers together why I think some really benefi 'al things would result." A theory about the organizational causes and consequences of lack of communication tells this Practitioner two managers need to spend more time together. The theory does not tell him how to get them together.

We are not saying these Practitioners felt inept or helpless, for in the main they did not. They did seem to feel they were pretty much on their own when it came to inventing techniques for accomplishing O.D. objectives. And there were concerns expressed that they were not sure they were going about things in the "right" way.

In virtually the same breath they might concede that they knew there is no "right" way, that the quest for an "O.D. cookbook" (as several called it) is bound to be frustrated because conditions vary so much from organization to organization.

These Practitioners found it very useful to talk to each other as one means of resolving the desire for a cookbook with the knowledge that one did not exist. They reported frequently in the interviews that one of the major values of the program they were attending (the NTL Institute's Program for Specialists in Organization Training and Development) was that it gave

them the chance to exchange ideas and experiences with others who were doing the same kind of work. Some spoke of getting quite "lonely" in their organizations and of needing more chances to "recharge my batteries". In the context of the interviews it was usually quite clear that "lonely" meant the development of feelings of doubt that one was going about O.D. in an effective manner; and "recharge my batteries" meant learning that other O.D. Practitioners had similar problems and that it was all worth the effort and the frustration.

When Practitioners were asked in the interviews what specific things they were picking up from each other, they mentioned in particular techniques for getting started with Clients. This is the problem of access and of getting business that was discussed at length earlier. It is significant that the Program these Practitioners were attending included, at their request, several sessions on the problem of explaining O.D. to people in the organization who did not know about it or were hostile toward it. All of the professional resource people to this Program were queried at length on how they dealt with this problem when they went into an organization as a consultant on O.D.

To some extent the process of acquiring ideas and techniques from external sources that the Practitioner performs continuously remains rather obscure in the interviews. In the interviews, Practitioners were encouraged to talk about what they were doing in their organizations. The source of their ideas and techniques, if it was mentioned at all, tended to come up as a parenthetical comment. An example would be a comment like this: "I decided to try a confrontation design which I heard about from _____ (mentions a well-known consultant) at a conference last summer. What we did

was..." The Practitioner would then proceed to describe what he had done without referring again to the consultant or to the process by which he had heard about the technique.

Thus, it is hard to say with more precision how Practitioners are assimilating new material from other Practitioners and independent consultants. What this may be saying about the Practitioner's own learning process will be commented on further in the next section.

These references to external consultants deserve some further mention. Five or six of those interviewed had had extensive relationships with external consultants in the recent past at the time they were interviewed. In terms of our model, the external consultant is a powerful source of new ideas and techniques and the interviews reveal quite clearly that Practitioners are able to learn a great deal in these relationships. External consultants have the additional property of keeping the twin issues of what to do and how to do it together. Or, put the other way around, the Practitioner has the problem of inventing his own process of implementation if he gets his ideas out of books or from speeches. If he is working with a consultant, he gets both the ideas and, presumably, the techniques for implementing them from the same source and at the same time.

The Practitioner doesn't sit back and watch the consultant work, of course; at least these Practitioners we interviewed did not. The point is, rather, that by having the consultant there to talk with the two men can give joint consideration to what to change and to how to change it.

Thus far the O.D. Theory element has been portrayed as affecting the Practitioner. It is important to note that in a few cases in the interviews, Practitioners expressed the desire to affect Theory and the Profession, too.

That is, they spoke of wanting to write up some of the work they were doing for possible circulation to others. A number of those interviewed had prepared extensive working documents for circulation to others in their own organizations, and it is a relatively short step from this to external circulation. Two of those interviewed had recently presented descriptions of their work at conferences and felt that they had contributed something important. In recent years, various conferences on O.D. have made extensive use of the inputs of Practitioners and these practices probably should be continued and even extended. Such presentations give the Practitioner an opportunity to bring together and make explicit the variety of things he has been doing. The learning from such an effort can be quite important. Certainly the extensive use which other professions have made of the reports of their Practitioners suggested that O.D. can reap the same benefits.

THE O.D. PRACTITIONER AND HIS PROGRAM

The Practitioner's Program, we said, really includes all the behavior by him which he would call "O.D. work". Defined this way the entire discussion to this point has really been about O.D. Programs for we have been talking about what the Practitioner <u>does</u> in relation to Clients and to Evaluators. What remains is to examine the meaning of what the Practitioner is doing to himself. This includes his feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, his own ideas about what he has learned thus far and about what further kinds of personal and professional development he needs, and his thoughts about his own career in the organization, particularly looking to the future.

Consideration of these issues is important for several reasons. For

one thing, as with many other new lines of endeavor, many of the early O.D. Practitioners were fired by almost a missionary zeal. This commitment they held in common with many of their counterparts in the universities and the independent training and consulting organizations. But now we are seeing more and more second and even third generation O.D. people in organizations. They were not "present at the creation". O.D. for them may not have quite the deep personal significance which the pioneers felt. The question is whether such a shift toward a more matter-of-fact stance has consequences for the doing of O.D.

Closely related to the first issue is the question of whether anything in particular needs to be done with new O.D. people to help them with these problems of the kind and nature of the commitment that is needed to do O.D.

Finally there is the bundle of paradoxes that is the O.D. role itself. One is basically in the business of upsetting the very organization one depends on for employment. One seeks personal rewards and advancement by doing things which often bother and irritate people. One's own close friends may emerge as individuals who are blocking the O.D. Program by being as they are. The Practitioner must be able to live reasonably comfortably with only the most fragmentary and ambiguous knowledge of his true value to the system. Adjacent to the O.D. role in an organization may be many other jobs, both line and staff, which carry greater rewards without entailing nearly as much frustration, and the Practitioner may well be tempted to seek a kind of refuge in them. For all these reasons we need to look at the kinds of reactions Practitioners have to the role.

From the interviews it is clear that the single greatest cause of frustration is the difficulty of getting a clear go-ahead signal from Eval-

uators and the companion difficulty of getting potential Clients interested in participating in an O.D. Program. Various other specific things were mentioned in the interviews, but these were mainly local to a particular organization. Only on the subject of getting started did the Practitioners unanimously agree that it is, or can be, an extremely frustrating process. "I'm giving my management six more months to recognize that I exist," said one Practitioner, "then I'm leaving - and I have one solid offer in my pocket to back that up." While few others spoke quite this directly it was clear that many others held similar attitudes.

It is not simply a matter of being unequivocally blocked by management or by uninterested Clients, either. In one of the more surprising interviews the Practitioner gave what seemed to be a description of a very effective series of working relationships he had established around the system. However, after speaking for over thirty minutes about the variety of things he was involved in, he stated that he had decided to leave this organization. In looking back over all the things he described, it is clear that he was succeeding in spite of numerous barriers. Among the more important was a rather negative image O.D. had in his organization (not related to his particular efforts), an immediate superior who would not support his efforts, and the fact that he was operating essentially as a one-man operation with no one else in his vicinity of the organization to talk to or give help. He finally reached a point where the ratio of effort to pay off was unacceptable.

Near the end of the section on Practitioner-Evaluator relationships, we talked about the importance of "process accomplishment". Those comments are relevant here, also. The greatest barrier to process accomplishment as revealed in the interviews was the presence in the organization of a person

or persons who were actively hostile to an O.D. effort. The appearance of such individuals in the midst of an O.D. effort is not uncommon: the problem was mentioned in over half the interviews and could be described as an acute difficulty in at least five cases.

It would be a mistake to create a general category of "O.D. villains or "recalcitrant Theory X managers" and let it go at that as a fact of organizational life. There seem to be a variety of reasons why a man can come to be an active opponent of an O.D. effort. Some do hold the classical authoritarian attitudes of the Theory X manager. Some may have a sufficient amount of anxiety about their own position that they cannot entertain a close examination of their style and its effects without feeling quite threatened. Some may feel quite honestly that the promise of O.D. does not justify the investment of time and money that it entails. Some may be antagonistic at a more personal level to the Practitioner himself as a result of past events where they have encountered each other. Some, particularly younger men who have extensive formal education in management themselves, may not feel that O.D. adds anything of significance to what they already know and are trying to do.

All these various types of resistors can be inferred from the interviews. What they have in common is that the Practitioners don't feel they can reach them with their messages about O.D., despite months of trying every avenue of approach they can think of. Often these individuals occupy positions that place them squarely in the past of the O.D. effort, and the Practitioner comes to feel that if he cannot somehow get through or around the man his Program is dead.

Certainly, viewed from the outside such states of chronic impasse between a Practitioner and some potential Client or an Evaluator should be

resolvable by using some of the very techniques the Practitioner uses for helping others out of their states of chronic impasse. But such is not always the case. For one thing, several Practitioners reported that they had already tried, consciously and deliberately, to work through these issues using specific conflict resolution techniques. The ancient problem of over-involvement plagues O.D. Practitioners as much as it does the rest of the human race, apparently, when it comes to working on their own interpersonal relations. In some cases, Practitioners reported that they had been helped through these difficulties by external consultants. In one situation, however, the Practitioner's conflict revolved around the question of whether he could use external consultants, so he was unable to use outside help to work through the very issue that produced the need for outside help.

Furthermore, as noted when the idea of process accomplishment was introduced, Practitioners tend to hold themselves to norms of behavior which preclude "power struggles" with potential resistors. They would rather not engage in politicking to advance their Program although they differed on their degree of distaste for these modes of behavior.

Many of these problems were mentioned in the interviews when the Practitioner was talking about his own future in the organization and his future as an O.D. Practitioner. Where the Practitioner was working in a climate of basic support, the mood invariably was one of optimism, continued personal growth as a professional, and increased payoffs to the organization. These positive expectations were held in spite of the fact that those who spoke this way saw O.D. as hard work and certainly not without its disappointments.

It was where the Practitioner could not feel the basic support of him

and his work that little sense of optimism and relish for the future appeared in the interviews. Some spoke, as we have noted, of leaving their organizations. Some were giving serious consideration to moving out of O.D. work and into some more traditional function in the system such as regular personnel work. Some seemed to be postponing any decision in the hope that those who were blocking them would change or, as one Practitioner expected, be promoted out of the way of the O.D. Program. Interestingly enough, there is some indication in the interviews that those who were feeling blocked and unsupported in their systems had more ambitious aims for their own personal development than did those who were quite pleased with the way their work was going. Those who felt good about their work spoke almost laconically about learning a little more about this or that technique, having a look at the potential application of this or that new theory, perhaps investigating one new type of group technique or another for possible use in the organization. In contrast, there was more urgency and determination in the comments about their own development made by those who were feeling blocked. It is as if they were saying: "My company may be able to block my work in the system but they are damn well not going to block my own development."

The question, which cannot be answered here but only raised, is whether self development which is in reaction to (rather than in concert with) the system is likely to further alienate the Practitioner from his organization. And if such alienation takes place, what then are the consequences for his practice, in that organization or elsewhere?

O.D. PRACTICE IN PERSPECTIVE

In this concluding section we want to do two things. First, from the great number of observations about O.D. work that have been made, the really

crucial issues need to be extracted. Second, having identified these crucial issues, the question is how they may be worked out in the future.

Out of all the things that have been said, the two themes that stand out are: (1) the problem of getting started or, as it has also been called at various points, the problem of gaining access, of getting business, of selling O.D.; and (2) the problem of the effectiveness of O.D., or as we have also called it, the problem of accomplishment. Both of these issues have come up in all the sections of this report in one way or another. Both involve the interaction of all the elements of the model of O.D. work which was sketched at the beginning.

Getting an O.D. effort going in an organization is difficult for a number of reasons, all of which have been mentioned at one point or another. The Evaluator or Client is busy; he has lots of other things on his mind; he is tending increasingly (as MBA programs and other forms of managerial education proliferate) to feel that he already knows all the current techniques for improving operations. The substance of O.D. is a complex thing itself, not easy to describe efficiently, full of debatable assumptions and strategies - the kind of subject matter which is excellent for midnight bull sessions, but still pretty nebulous for an organization to commit thousands of dollars to. The Practitioner tries to hold himself to norms of behavior which are at least unusual in this society, and which are to many men downright suspect. These are the norms of openness and collaboration.

So we have the situation of a man who thinks he's a pretty good manager and is not even sure that he has any basic problems in his organization, being asked to consider that he does have problems according to criteria which seem somewhat strange by a man whose behavior may seem even stranger.

In light of such a collection of potential cross purposes it is impressive that as many O.D. Programs get going as actually do.

The Practitioners who seemed to be having the most success in getting their O.D. Programs going exhibited great flexibility in their approaches to Evaluators and Clients. They did not need any particular triggering events, props, places, or occa .ons to begin to talk O.D. to managers in their organizations. Development of this kind of flexibility on the part of more and more Practitioners seems clearly to be the process by which the "getting started issue" will cease to be such a thorny and chancy matter. It will never be an automatic, cut-and-dried process, of course, nor would the Practitioners we interviewed want it to be. As long as the unique needs and interests of the Client and the Evaluator are important, every initiation will be different from every other one.

We can be less sanguine, for the short run at least, about the problem of determining the effectiveness of O.D. work and of its correlate at the personal level, the Practitioner's problem of determining what he is accomplishing. It appears that for an indefinite period O.D. Programs are going to be vulnerable to the charge that they aren't really changing the organization. Practitioners, as a result, will have to continue to live with the ambiguity that surrounds whether they are accomplishing anything or not. We are not saying there will be no individual success stories where there is fairly clear data that major change occurred as a result of O.D. The point is, rather, that these success stories will continue to be extremely difficult to transfer from one organization to another, just as they have been in the past. O.D. work will probably continue to be somewhat fad-ridden as a result, where a technique that seems to work wonders in Company A will be seized by Practitioners in a host of other organizations and eagerly applied,

only to find that their particular organizational circumstances are enough different from Company A that the technique has nowhere near the dramatic effects that it did in the first instance.

To a great extent, the Practitioner's practical problem of measuring results is a specific example of a problem which has always plagued the social sciences. These sciences borrowed a model of the explanation of change from the physical sciences back in the 19th Century and have been struggling with the problems the model creates ever since. The model requires the exact specification of an independent variable, the exact specification of a dependent variable, and the ability to control all other "extraneous" sources which may affect the behavior of the dependent variable. The model has been bent and elaborated; more elaborate mathematical models and the advent of computer technology have made it possible to deal with more than one or two variables at a time; experimenters have become astonishly inventive at controlling extraneous causes of variability.

O.D. Practitioners, however, in common with others who are managing large-scale efforts to change patterns of human behavior have great difficulty with this model as a guide to measuring change. The "independent variable" is a field of interacting forces, no one of which can be easily defined independent of the field. The field itself can be only grossly controlled. The "dependent variable" is also a field of interacting forces, many of which are the same forces as exist in the independent variable-field. Both fields are changing through time in ways the "experimenter" cannot control. Finally, throughout the entire process the system which is supposedly the object of the research is engaged in other work entirely which is wholly independent of the experiment. It is as if an experimenter were attempting

to administer an I.Q. test to a woman while her baby was being delivered.

Nonetheless, O.D. Practitioners and professional researchers alike are today attempting to trace specific operating results in organizations to specific O.D. inputs while "controlling out" extraneous events which could be producing the change. Perhaps we are being overly pessimistic in suggesting that these efforts will never produce more than highly equivocal results, but this in any event is our conclusion.

What is needed instead, we suggest, is a new model of the change process and specifically of what change in a human organization means. The system theorists are beginning to talk about fields of forces conceived in a state of mutual causation moving forward through time. This is a promising line of inquiry.

Another approach involves putting the "experimenter" back into the change process. Instead of trying to show that his personality, values, style, biases, did not affect the results one way or another, admit these factors into the relevent field of forces. In terms of O.D. this would mean regarding the state of relations between the Practitioner and the Client and Evaluator as part of the field of forces. Instead of "standing back" and introducing changes, as the traditional model requires, the Practitioner "jumps in" and collaborates in a change process. This, it will be recalled, was what most of the Practitioners we interviewed saw themselves as doing. How he "jumped in" and what he did when he got into the field of forces become part of the data. What is then generalized for application to other organizations is not just an impersonal technique (for example, a technique like "sensitivity training"), but instead a man-technique-system interaction. The "finding" then would be stated in the form: "This sort of a Practitioner

using this sort of a technique in this sort of a system achieved the following results..." In terms of the model this paper has employed, the statement would be: "This sort of a Practitioner-Client-Evaluator-Program interaction resulted in the following changes in the Practitioner, the Client, the Evaluator, the Program, and in their interaction..."

Although such speculation as this is somewhat abstract and vague, it is included to try to suggest some directions the profession might go to deal with the problem of determining O.D. effectiveness. If anything, this speculation is probably not abstract and sweeping enough, for we are all more bound to the definitions of truth and causation contained in the traditional model than we even begin to realize.

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